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21 June 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Associate Deputy Director for Intelligence

FROM

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SUBJECT

: The Beirut Hijacking

As leader of a CIA/DIA intelligence team [redacted] in 1978/1979, Chief of the Iran Analytic Center in 1979, and later Chief of the DDI Task Force during much of the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979/1980, I have a feeling of deja vu about the current crisis. Basically, I agree with the analysis being presented by the OGI/NESA Working Group. My discussions with D/NESA and the analysts have been on format and presentation. For whatever it is worth:

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1. Analysis

--Lebanese politics are like Iranian politics--confused and unpredictable. Western political thought, morals, and mores have to be erased from the analytical base. Shia politics are particularly byzantine because lying and hyperbole are an accepted way of life.
(This is not an exaggeration).

--There is a relationship, albeit murky, between Lebanese Amal and some of the Iranian revolutionaries. Imam Musa Sadr, the Lebanese Shia leader, was the pre-revolutionary Guru for several Iranian principals, including Ibrahim Yazdi--a pro-Western, but religious early adviser to Ayatollah Khomeini. Other Iranian Shias, who had been exiled by the Shah, lived in Beirut and became part of the Shia Amal organization. After the Iranian revolution, many stayed in Beirut. Others returned to Tehran, but obviously the long established personal relationships remained intact. (I think this establishes the similarity of the situations, the cast, and possible outcomes).

--The same schism that appeared in Iranian politics in 1979/80--between the pro-Western, religious, moderate socialists and the anti-Western, religious, hardline fanatics (Hizballah)--has occurred in the Shia community in Lebanon.

--Nabih Barri represents the more moderate Shias. He has an uncanny resemblance, for me at least, to Sadegh

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Ghotbzadeh--the Iranian leader

Ghotbzadah had a certain personal following, albeit not nearly the magnitude of Barri's. Ghotbzadeh tried to be helpful, promised deliverance, and failed miserably. He was executed several years ago.

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--Barri appears to be in the same position as Ghotbzadeh. He wants to be helpful and would release the hostages if he had the opportunity. He is a hostage of the situation, however, because he has to contend with the radical Hizballah both on a philosophical level and for practical considerations--Hizaballah has some of the hostages. He has exaggerated his importance and lied about the role he can play.

--Barri, therefore, has to meet the bottom line demands of all of the hijackers including Hizballah--the return of the Shia prisoners from Israel. I cannot see any circumstance, except illness of the hostages, in which he could accept anything less.

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--As the situation drags on, Barri's position will weaken. While "time" is irrelevant in Middle East politics--one day, one month, one year, warlords don't seem to last long under the best of circumstances, especially if they aren't tough or radical enough. Barri has told his followers, as well as the Hizballah, that he can deliver. If he can't, it is goodbye Nabih. I think his time is running out.

--Even if the Israeli prisoners are released right now, there will be prolonged negotiations between Barri and the Hizaballah over the freeing of all of the hostages. I believe there is only a 50/50 chance all hostages will be released. The aircraft crew appears to be in the most danger if there is no resolution soon. There does not appear to be any authority in Beirut with the stature of a Khomeini to order no more killing. Radical Hizballah obviously have no compunction about murder.

My conclusion, therefore, is the same as the DDI Working Group: There is a lot of bad news.

--The bottom line settlement is our hostages for the Shia prisoners in Israel.

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--If this demand is not met soon, the impact on Lebanese politics will be profound. Barri will be more and more irrelevant as the radicals take over. Beirut will go from mostly chaos to total chaos.

--There is now only a 50/50 chance all the hostages will be released. There is no such thing as a 'Shia promise,' as Barri says he has.

--The situation more and more appears to be a long-term hostage crisis--like the Iranian debacle.

--The aircraft crew is in great danger.

--The original Beirut hostages are not part of the package. If the Dawa prisoners are executed in Kuwait, they will be killed.

2. Presentation

--In retrospect about the Iranian crisis, I believe the Task Force's greatest problem was convincing ourselves that our pessimistic analytic conclusion was correct--Khomeini's bottom line settlement was the Shah and nothing else was important. Other deals and offers were irrelevant. (After the Shah died, the goals changed).

--Once we had arrived at that conclusion, it was almost too late to persuade others. I don't think we ever convinced the Carter Administration or most of the State Department.

--I fear a similar situation is developing now. As time goes by, more and more sources will be reporting there is a chance for a deal with Assad or somebody else. There will be reports the hijacking had been planned by Assad or the Iranians or whatever. I hate to keep harping on the word IRRELEVANT, but that is what all of the reporting will be. Our intellect almost forces us to seize on a glimmer of hope. Believe me-- prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

--Barri and the Hizballah have given their bottom line for the settlement. It is highly unlikely to change. The policymakers have to be given the bad news and it has to be repeated over and over again.

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"Bear before me to Khorasan, Zephyr, a kindly word,
To its scholars and men of learning and not to the witless herd.
And having faithfully carried the message I bid thee bear,
Bring me news of their doings and how they fare.....
Let not (fortune's) promise you to destruction lure,
Ne'er was her covenant faithful; ne'er was her pact secure."

The Diwan of Nasir-i-Khusru



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